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Scathe meic Beorh

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And plodding his path from the slow-ebbing light he was swallowed by shadow...

Myself to Myself

by

Scathe meic Beorh

Hilda awoke startled. She cried out. Her dream horrified her. A man was being punished in a manner as brutal as the blood-eagle, tied to—or in some way hanged from—crossed wooden beams. She could not be sure. She wiped her tears away, stood, and found her legs. A mist that reminded her of clouds lay close to the grassy earth where she walked. She moved with slowness, unsure of her steps, for she did not recognize the land. “A bad dream, but I feel good now,” Hilda said to herself, trying to build her confidence. It was then that she saw him. He sat at the riverside on an outsized stone. His legs were crossed, both feet tucked beneath him. His face was covered by a hood of a cloth not dyed, but she could see part of his long black beard. His hands, draped about his knees, looked strong; weathered. A bowl of salted fish and bread sat next to him. Hilda trusted any man who sat with such assurance. “Sir?” she said as she halted, placed her feet together, and folded her hands in front of her. “I am looking for my mother.... Do you know the *hlæf-dige*² called Alvi Stormursjávarsíða? I am her daughter, Hilda. My father is the *hlafweard*³ called Blad Starkbeväpnar. Do you know him?”

The stranger turned his face to Hilda and smiled. She took in a quick breath of surprise, for she had never seen such eyes—eyes like swirling woad pools—nor such peace upon any countenance.

“I am pleased to meet you, Hilda

Bladsdóttir. I am the *hlafweard* Frälsare⁴ Gudson.”

Do... do you know my fólk, Hlafweard Frälsare? And, will you tell me where this place might be? I have somehow gotten lost. I have awoken only a few moments ago, you see, and, while I slept, someone has moved me to a place I do not know.”

“Are you normally picked up and moved while you sleep, Hilda?”

“When I was little, yes, but not now. I’m too old to carry around. I have already begun my... my womanhood. *Oh!* I’m... I’m sorry....” Hilda’s hasty words made her blush and turn her eyes away.

Frälsare said nothing, only held out his hand for the girl to sit next to him on the stone. She inched forward. “Come,” said the warrior. “I see something in the river that may tell us where are your fólk.”

“You are a seer, Frälsare?”

“Some have called me a seer, yes. Come. *Sit.* I will give a young woman room enough of her own.” The lord slid to the edge of the stone. This provided Hilda with ample space to sit with him in comfort. She did so, and found that she held no fear of him whatever. His body did not threaten hers. She felt only tranquility with him.

“You are so calm, good sir.”

“Some say that as well.”

“How can a warrior such as yourself be one of such calm? My father is good to his family, but he is a violent man in his love for us and for our people. My mother, same as that. No one crosses our threshold with fire in his eyes and maintains that fire.”

“Strong fólk, Hilda, sounds to me. But many

² ‘loaf-kneader’ or bread-maker; origin of ‘lady’ (Old English)

³ ‘loaf-ward’ or loaf-keeper; origin of ‘lord’ (OE)

⁴ ‘Savior’ (Old Norse)

nightmares.”

“Sir?”

“Look into the waters as they run by. Close your eyes and tell me what you see.”

Hilda shut her eyes, but was taken aback by what she saw so that she opened them again in quickness and grabbed the arm of Frälsare to steady herself lest she fall from the rock.

“What did you see there, my lady?”

Hilda has never been called ‘lady’ before. She felt cared for by this strange warrior Frälsare. “I... I saw six warriors. They came across the river. They carried two people whose... whose throats were cut. Blood poured forth as if their deaths were new.”

“A party of armed men numbering less than seven are thieves.”

“I know those words. That is a saying of my father.”

“An old saying indeed. Who were the dead you saw?”

“I do not know. I could not see their faces.”

“Will you look again? Be not afraid, Hilda. I am here. Keep hold of my arm, if you wish.”

Hilda closed her eyes. Being of tough stock, she kept them closed as she wept and said what she saw. “The six warriors, two of them shield-bearing women... come toward us as if they walk over the waters—a magic feat I have never heard of before. Across the shoulders of the strongest two men are thrown... are thrown... a man and a woman. I still cannot see their faces.”

“Enough, sweet girl. Open your eyes. You have seen enough.”

Hilda coughed. Blood filled her mouth and spewed over the front of her white over-dress. “Something... wrong...” she said as she fell into the arms of her new friend.

#

“*Vakna, Hilda. Awaken.*”

Hilda opened her eyes. She felt hungry. Frälsare gave her salted fish and bread. She ate with hardiness. She stood. Her legs were stronger than before. “Did I sleep?”

“You slept, but now you are awake.

There is a pool of water just there. No breeze blows. Go and see yourself in it.”

Hilda went to the pool. She dropped to her knees. Her fingers savored the coolness of the long grasses where she knelt. She looked into the pool at her reflection. She cried out with what she saw, and recoiled. She fell backward. She scrambled across the ground like a wounded animal.

“What do you see?”

“My... my throat! It has been cut!”

“Yes. Last night. As you slept in the house of your fólk.”

“But... the six warriors I saw on the river?”

“*A party of armed men numbering less than seven are thieves.*”

“We... I... do you mean... that I and my fólk were... slain by thieves? As we slept? Slain by the six warriors I saw... *oh!* Was it my mother and father they carried? Where are they now? Where are my fólk? Was it my mother and father who lay dead on their shoulders? Where are we? This place is not my home! *I want to go home!*”

“Does this place not look like your home? Do you not recognize that oak tree just there? What about the riverside here? Does it not seem a little familiar to you? And those hills just there. Have you not climbed them many times?”

“Maybe. But... I have never heard of you, Frälsare. Who are your people? And... why do you dress as you do? You do not attire yourself like the men of my land. I also see now that you are not armed! You do not even carry a spear. I see not even a belt knife with you. Yet... your hands... they are weathered as they should be, yet soft like those of a woodworker. Do you work with wood?”

“I did, as a trade, before I began my true work.”

“What do you mean? What is a *true* work? Is not work what a man or woman does in life?”

“Have you heard this poem, Hilda?”

“Which? Say it.”

*“I know that I hanged,
on a wind-rocked tree,
nine whole nights,
with a spear wounded,
and to Odin offered,*

*myself to myself;
on that tree,
of which no one knows
from what root it springs.”*

“Yes. That is the word of All-Father Odin. We were being hurt by the witch called Heidi. She wished to destroy mankind. Odin saw no other way for us to be saved than to sacrifice himself on the majestic yew tree called *Yggdrasil*. He pierced his own heart with his own spear. Then, when he came back to life, he had with him a runic *godspell* that saves us all.”

“That is a beautiful story, Hilda.”

“It is a true story. It really happened.”

“I should know,” said Frälsare as he pulled his shirt from his belt and showed Hilda the wound in his side.

“My... my g-god Odin?”

“If that is what you wish to call me, yes. *I am*. The Beginning and the End. No one comes to the All-Father except through me.”

“Then... who are you?”

*“To Odin offered,
myself to myself;
on that tree...”*

“Will... you take me there, Frälsare? To the Tree?”

“I will. Look over there, Hilda.” Frälsare gestured with a nod. The girl turned her head.

“A cross... of wood?... *no! my dream!*”

“The Tree of Life, Hilda. Know that the one who believes in me, though found dead, yet shall live. Come. I have much to show you.”

And of Our Mother
by
David Sparenberg

If animals see and trust you
you are somebody
if sparrows rest
safely on your shoulders
if deer drink the silent
harmony of water from your palms
if the wolf with the lion
and the lamb walk beside you
if the bear brings you laughter, guidance
and wisdom of the medicine bundle and
eagle soars high overhead, miming
the narrative of new day
creation—then you are somebody:
beloved of our brother
the sun, our sister the moon
choreographing life's waters,
and of our Mother the Earth.

